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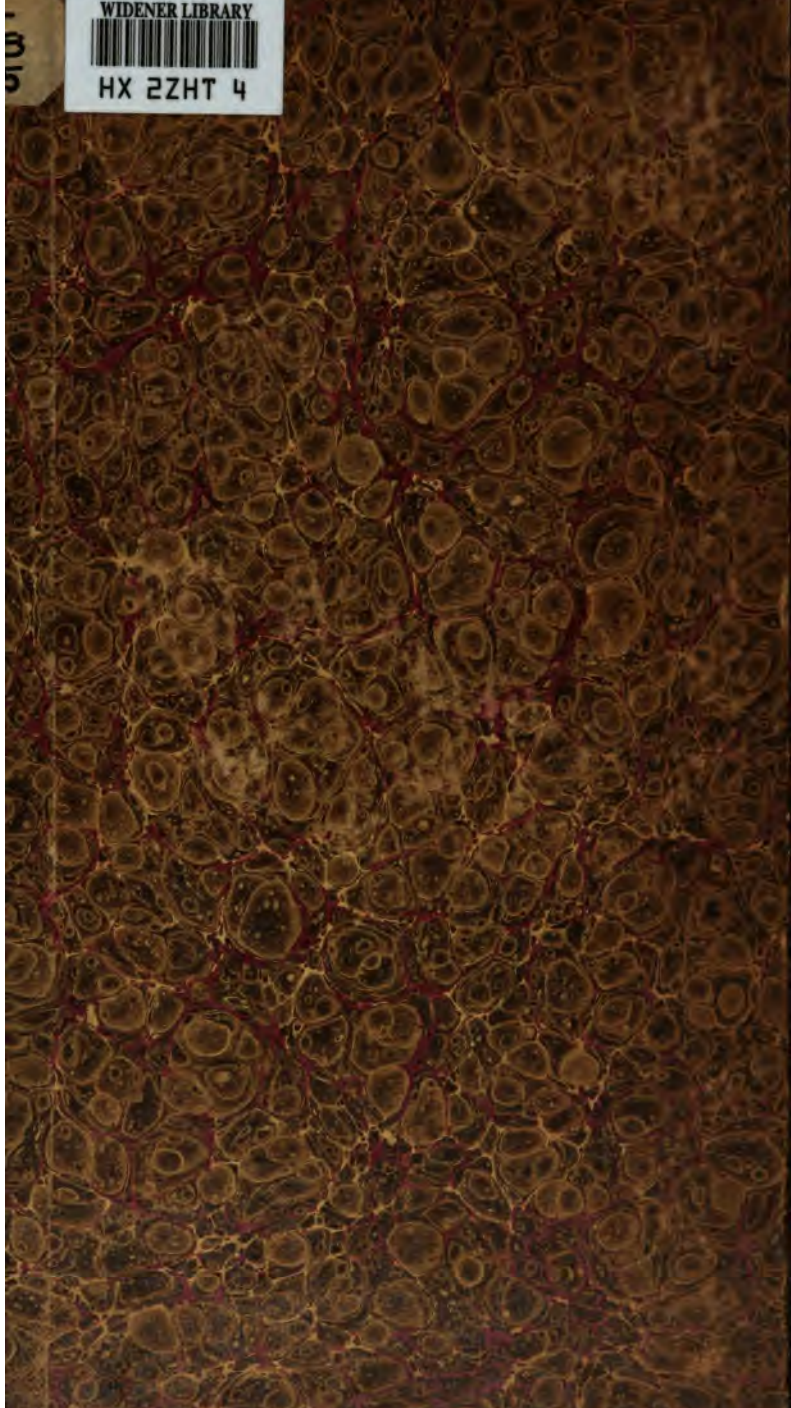
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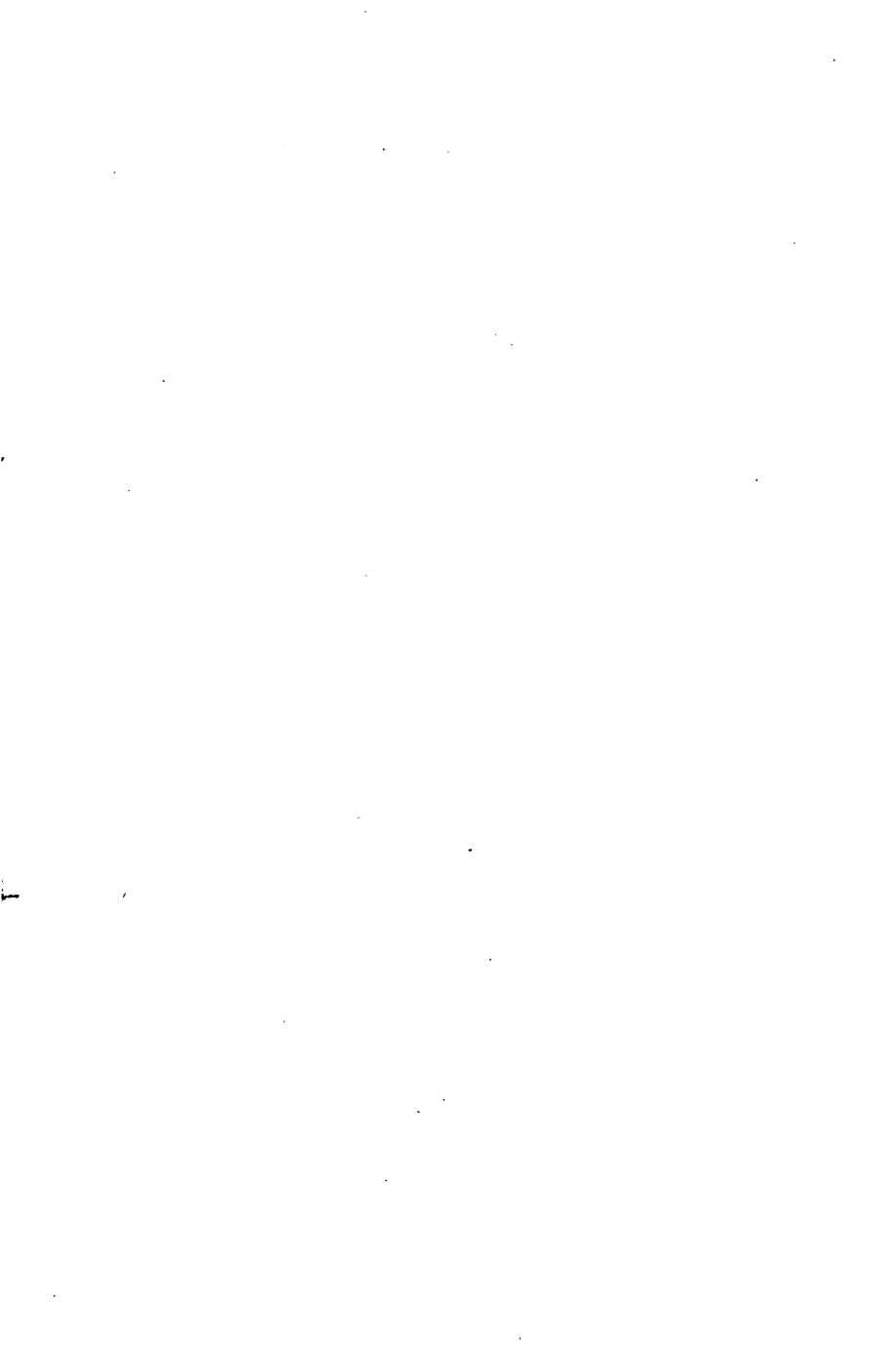
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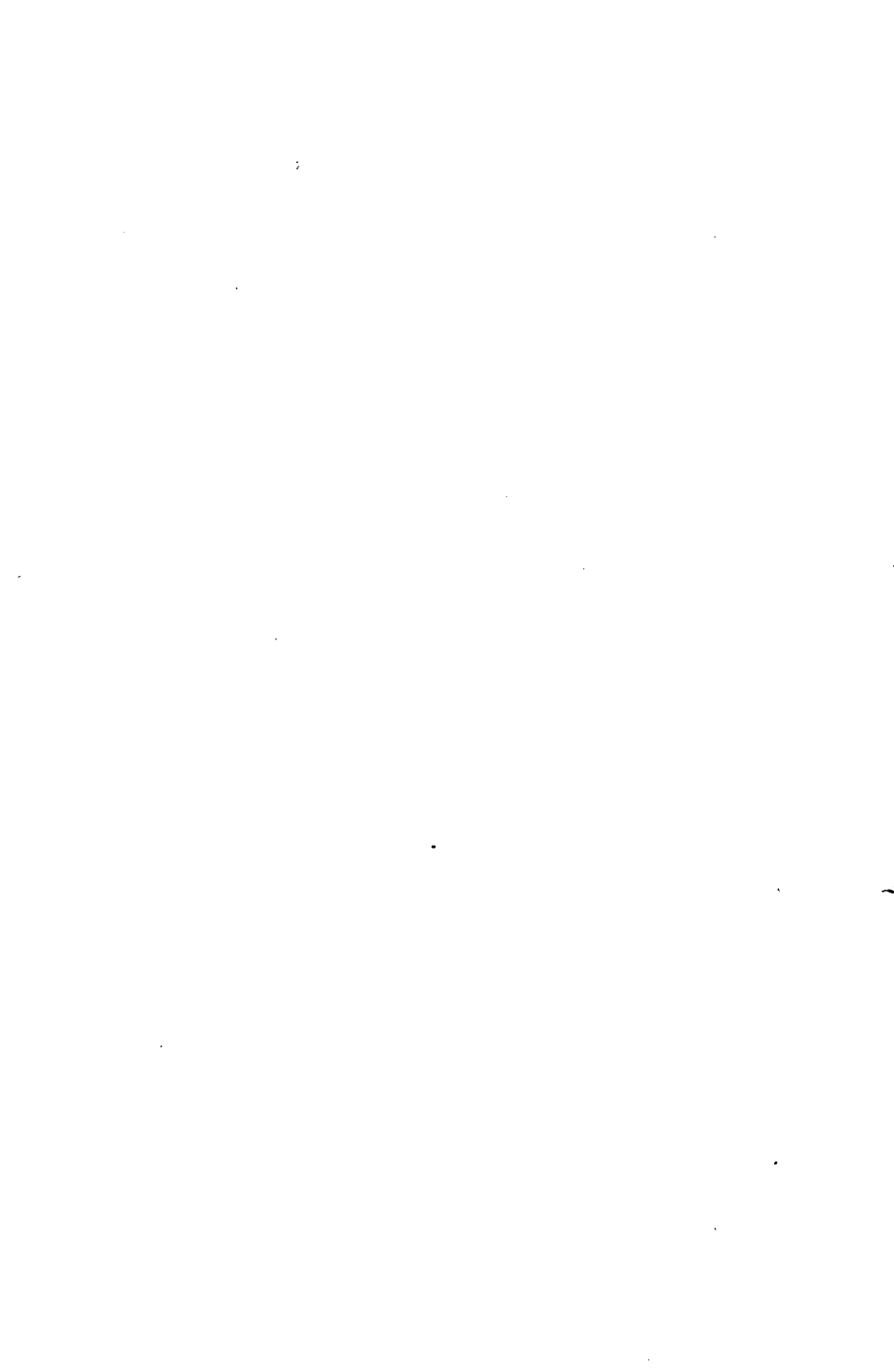
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OR

AN INDIGESTIBLE ROMANCE

A Farce in One Act

BY

LEWIS D. HUMPHREY

*Originally produced under the title of "An Indigestible Romance," at
Radcliffe College, Cambridge, February 17, 1899*

BOSTON:

Walter H. Baker & Co.

A BACHELOR'S BANQUET.

CHARACTERS.

MAJOR POMROY, *another victim of Fate.*

DICK FOSTER, *engaged to Miss Mortimer.*

NAT STILLMAN, *engaging to Miss Oldfield.*

MRS. MORTIMER, *a presiding deity.*

DELLA MORTIMER, *daughter of Mrs. Mortimer.*

CONSTANCE OLDFIELD, *niece of Major Pomroy.*

MCGINNIS, *servant of Foster and Stillman, with the doubtful virtue of being heard and not seen.*

COSTUMES.

DICK FOSTER, *Evening Dress.*

MRS. MORTIMER, *Evening Dress.*

DELLA MORTIMER, *Evening Dress.*

MAJOR POMROY, *Ordinary Street Dress.*

NAT STILLMAN, *Ordinary Street Dress.*

CONSTANCE OLDFIELD, *Ordinary Street Dress.*



A BACHELOR'S BANQUET;

OR,

AN INDIGESTIBLE ROMANCE.

SCENE.— *The sitting-room in the bachelor apartments of FOSTER and STILLMAN. Mantel, C., back. Entrances, R., R. C., and L. General disorder. Newspapers flung about. Table covered with magazines; also dish containing mixture. Boots and slippers in left corner. Dressing-gown flung over armchair, R. Pipes and tobacco littered about. Walls covered with hunting and sporting paraphernalia. General effect of confusion and over-crowded room. White necktie and dress coat draped over looking-glass over mantel; also collar.*

(Enter DICK, R., covered from head to foot with apron, a soup-ladle in one hand and a salt-cellar in the other.)

DICK (*glancing anxiously at clock on mantel*). By all the gods! half-past five, and not even an *entrée* ready yet. (*Drops ladle and salt into chair, R.*) Here's a sweet state of things! (*Drops into chair, L.*) Confound the kitchen clock! Knocks off work without saying a word, and gets a fellow into a devil of a scrape! There, I thought there was plenty of time to get dinner ready, and they ought to be getting here now. By the way, where's the Sport? Good heavens! I hope nothing's happened to him. (*Rises, and paces the room as well as he can.*) Well, if he does not show up, we get no fruit. Great Scott! what's this? (*Looks at bowl on table.*) The salad dressing, as sure as I'm a biped! Well, that's only the sixth thing forgotten. Who's that? (*Stops and listens.*) Steps too light for Sport; must be they, as sure as fate. (*Rushes to mantel, flings off apron, and puts on collar and necktie.*) Talk of catching trains! My! but that was a good idea of mine, getting ready dressed to begin with. I foresaw some hitches, and it is better to be ready for an emergency. Now, when they come, I'll be all ready. Confound that necktie! (*Pulls at tie in vain.*) Oh, well, if you don't want to, you needn't. (*Stops and listens.*) They're not coming, anyway. That's a mean trick to play a fellow. Really, old fellow

(*talking to himself in glass, and still struggling with tie*), you're looking pale and worn. Brace up now. The situation's not so bad, after all. In the first place, you're engaged. Good! In the second, you have invited your *fiancée* and her mother to dinner at six. Not so good! In the third place, you are bound to cook the dinner yourself. Bad; but you couldn't help it. Your *fiancée* suggested it as a joke. You swore you could. She bet you couldn't. You, of course, with true sporting blood, took her up, and there you are. She promised she'd eat the dinner, and judge of the merits of her future husband as a cook. Mother-in-law knows nothing about it. Heaven be thanked! Another step. (*A knock on the door L.; DICK hurries on coat, smooths hair, and prinks generally.*) The hour has come (*looks around the room*), order or no order. (*Goes to door L., and opens with a flourish.*)

VOICE (*outside, L.*). Please, sir, here's the pudding you ordered.

DICK. Bless my soul, the frozen pudding! I'd forgotten all about it. Well—er—there's no room for it in here. Leave it there; I'll attend to it later. Thank you. Good-afternoon. (*Coming down.*) Seventh thing. But anyway the pudding's a departure, an extra. I am justified in forgetting that. (*Stops and sniffs.*) There's the soup burning, I'm sure of it. (*Starts for R. More steps heard without, R. C.*) Now, who can that be? (*Stops.*) Shall it be soup or door? Heads or tails? Heads, soup; tails, door. (*Produces coin.*) Tails it is, I'll be bound. (*Starts for door, R. C. Sound of knocks and kick.*)

NAT (*without; crossly*). Hurry up, can't you? I've been waiting here a year, with my arms full.

DICK. Keep cool, Sport, I'm coming. (*Opens the door.*)

(*Enter, R. C., NAT with arms full of bundles, which he throws anywhere, and drops into chair upon the ladle and salt-cellar. Rises hastily.*)

NAT. Keep cool, did you say? What in the deuce is that? (*Looks at seat.*)

DICK (*laughing*). Oh, yes; the ladle and the salt. I'd forgotten them. Never mind. There are so many things, you know. (*Puts them on floor.*)

NAT. My dear fellow, that's painfully evident. Nobody but an engaged man—

DICK. I don't blame you for being sore with envy. (*Examines bundles.*) But seriously, Sport, if I could get hold of McGinnis, I'd smuggle him in here and make him fix up a dinner for us.

(*Throughout this scene, both try to clear up room by putting articles in other places, thereby increasing the confusion.*)

NAT. I'm glad to see you're coming round to my opinions, but it's too late now. McGinnis is probably far away.

DICK. I thought I would be all right alone.

NAT. Lack of confidence never was a weakness of yours.

DICK. What made you so late? Half-past five, and nothing ready except the frozen pudding and probably the guests.

NAT (*jumping up*). Great Scott! half-past five, and I'm not dressed yet.

DICK. I told you to dress before you started. Who's that coming? (*Steps approach door, L.; low knock.*)

NAT (*stopping at R.*). That's a man's step. Don't answer, for heaven's sake! (*Very agitated; another knock.*)

DICK. Why not? It may be Della. We can't leave them there, even if there isn't any dinner.

NAT (*goes L.; agitated*). Who's there? (*No answer.*)

DICK. Answer immediately! (*Long pause. Loud blowing through the key-hole.*) I shall find out what this means.

NAT (*mopping face*). Let me go. I'll talk with him. Er—what is that fearful smell like fried paint?

DICK. Lord! Something must be on fire! (*Rushes out, R.*)

NAT (*opening door L.; peers around outside*). In the name of heaven, McGinnis, what are you doing here?

VOICE (*outside*). Hush! hush! Are they there?

NAT. Who's here? What are you talking about?

DICK (*from other side*). Who's there, Nat?

NAT (*shouting*). McGinnis.

DICK. McGinnis? We're saved. Nab him. I can't leave this. (*Loud crash heard.*)

NAT (*shouting*). All right. Come in, McGinnis.

VOICE. I can't, I only wanted some money I forgot and left behind; but I didn't dare make myself known, for Mr. Foster told me not to show myself around here for the rest of the day.

NAT. Well, he wants you now. Hurry up.

VOICE. I've got an engagement with a lady. I really must be going.

NAT. Hold on. (*Following him out, L.*) Hurry up, Dick.

DICK. Hang on, I'm coming.

(*Enter at R., with dishcloth over arm, face covered with flour, a poker in hand. Rushes across stage and exit, L. Tussle outside. Shouts.*)

DICK (*without*). McGinnis, you've got to. (*Sounds of rapidly retreating footsteps; enter, R. C., MISS OLDFIELD and MAJOR POMROY; she with sunshade; he with cane; both laden with bundles.*)

MAJOR (*looking about*). No one here. This is very strange. (*Pompous, dignified.*)

CONSTANCE (*looking about*). Why I certainly thought I heard some one say, "Come in."

MAJOR. I'm sure, my dear, I did. Perhaps they're in another room. It sounded as if they called from a distance. (*Starts for L.*)

CONST. But, Uncle, do you think we ought to go any farther ?

MAJOR. My dear, I must see the young man who lives in these apartments. He's got that photograph.

CONST. Do look at all these things. (*Looks in bowl on table, etc.*)

MAJOR (*going to door at R.*). The room in here seems to be prepared for a dinner-party. (CONSTANCE *approaches and looks over his shoulder.*)

CONST. The table is set for four people, isn't it ? I think we ought to make some sort of noise to let them know we're here.

MAJOR. I'll call. (*Shouting.*) Young man ! Young man !

CONST. (*listening*). I don't hear any answer. What can it mean ?

MAJOR. It's my opinion he's afraid of us, and is trying to evade us. I shall go through the whole apartment.

CONST. O Uncle, do you smell that queer odor. Something's happened, I'm sure. Can the house be on fire ?

MAJOR. Very strange, very strange.

CONST. It makes me feel so creepy. Do you know, Uncle, it makes me think of Pompeii. Everything just as it was left.

MAJOR. I'll see who's out there. You stay here, my dear ; I'll soon be back.

CONST. But I'm afraid to stay here alone. Oh, do let me go with you. It is so much safer to be together.

MAJOR. Very well, come along. Very strange. Strange. (*Exeunt both at R., leaving bundles.*)

(*Enter at L., DICK fanning himself with handkerchief, and NAT holding on to his.*)

DICK (*angrily*). Well, that will cost McGinnis his job, or I'm no good at guessing.

NAT (*gloomily*). Those banisters are a good deal harder than my head. He ought to suffer for that.

DICK. Here, let me fix it for you, old fellow. Where is your handkerchief ?

NAT (*producing it*). There's some arnica on the mantel.

DICK (*wetting handkerchief and tying it on*). You'll look well for the dinner, Sport. (*Laughing.*) You look as if you had been fighting the Spaniards.

NAT (*anxiously*). Do I look very badly ? (*Looks at himself in glass.*) Great Scott ! I'm a sight, and not dressed yet, either. Blow that clock !

DICK (*jumping up*). Nat, I have struck the very thing. We will stop it, or at least fix it.

NAT. What are you talking about ?

DICK (*opening door of clock*). Why, can't you see ? It is now quarter of six ; nearly time for the company. I now turn the hands back to five o'clock. Nowhere near time for company. Company

comes. Outrageously early! Host's nowhere near ready for them. See? (*Closes door of clock.*)

NAT (*laughing*). Well, I'll be — (*Starts and looks toward kitchen.*)

DICK. We must set our watches, of course, to agree, so there will be no doubt or suspicion. (*They set watches.*) There, that clinches the matter.

NAT. I hope we don't forget to change them back.

DICK. Now, when the company appears surprised, why we simply refer to the watches. (*Takes out watch with a flourish.*)

NAT (*starting again*). Did you hear that noise in the kitchen?

DICK (*lolling in chair*). My dear fellow, I'm as indifferent to the kitchen now, and its noises, as a man in love ought to be. What's the trouble with you, Nat?

NAT (*attempting to be facetious*). Can't you see any traces of injuries?

DICK. Don't try to put me off that way. You're ridiculously nervous; very grouchy; all unheard of things for you. (*Regarding him closely.*) I believe you're in love.

NAT (*starting guiltily*). Oh, well, of course, that's it, then. You ought to know the symptoms.

DICK (*solemnly*). Jilted?

NAT (*crossly*). How did you guess it?

DICK. Begin at the beginning, now, and don't stop till you get to the end. It'll do you good. Fire away. (*Long pause.*) Come, come! Is she blonde or brunette? Where did you meet her? Who is she, anyway?

NAT (*kicking bundle on floor*). I never met her, and I don't even know who she is. O Dick (*burying his face in hands*), I'm wretched!

DICK (*jumping up*). Are you guying me, you old fool?

NAT. I wish I were. Look at this. (*Takes framed photograph from underneath coat, without looking up.*)

DICK (*taking it and looking*). Well, if you don't take the cake, then I'll retire from public life. I expected you'd do something unusual before you settled down; but to fall in love with a woman you never saw, never met, don't even know her name—well, you've exceeded my wildest expectations. (*Laughs long and loud.*)

NAT (*looking up enthusiastically*). But isn't she handsome, though?

DICK (*musingly*). Where have I seen that face before?

NAT. O Dick, do you know her? (*Rushes toward him.*)

DICK. Now that's provoking. I have certainly seen her before.

NAT. Oh, think, old man! Think; do think! Where?

DICK. Well, I'll tell you when I can think. Where under the canopy did you find the thing?

NAT. Oh, yes. Why, I started out, you know, for them (*point-*

ing towards bundles); I saw this white thing lying on the sidewalk in front of our house. I picked it up, and that — that is what I saw. (*Attitude.*)

DICK. My dear fellow, I prophesy that you will be crazy before you're much older, you poor deluded owl!

NAT. If I only knew who she is. Haven't you thought yet?

DICK. My dear fellow, I'm thinking of something else. First, the original of this thing (*handing picture back*) may be a sight; probably is. Second, you may not like her even if the picture does not flatter. Third, she may be married. Fourth, she may not want to marry you if she isn't already married — although that's hardly worth considering.

NAT. She must return such love as mine. (*Attitude.*)

DICK. Well, at any rate, old fellow, we haven't time to discuss the matter now. They'll be here in a minute, and you're not ready for them yet. Seriously, you must brace up now, while I see what you drew on your travels. We'll talk this matter over later. (*Looks over bundles and checks off on note-book. NAT pays no attention, but continues looking at picture.*)

DICK. Fruit.

NAT. How soft!

DICK (*starting*). For heaven's sake, what are those? (*Sees MAJOR'S bundles.*)

NAT (*irritably*). How do I know?

DICK. Well, we can't have them here. I'll just chuck them outside! Very strange. (*Goes to door, L., with them; calling out.*) Great Scott! frozen pudding.

NAT (*putting picture in pocket*). I'll never let it go.

DICK. Come quick, Nat, the pudding's gone. Hurry.

NAT (*vaguely*). Pudding?

DICK (*rushing in, drags NAT out*). Come, you must help me. There'll be time. I'll write to them, to be on the safe side. (*Selects large sheet of wrapping-paper writes in large letters, pins on mantel.*) "Wait. Will return soon. Signed, Dick Foster and Nat Stillman." There, that's all right.

(*Both hurry out, L.; MAJOR and MISS OLDFIELD appear at the door, R.*)

MAJOR. Who's there?

CONST. I'm sure I heard voices.

MAJOR. There's no one here now, that's certain.

CONST. I believe this house is haunted. That is, this apartment, if apartments are haunted. (*Starts toward centre and stops.*) Good heavens! Uncle! Our things! Gone!

MAJOR (*alarmed*). What! Gone! Impossible!

CONST. Well, they're gone, at any rate. Everything! See! They were right here when we left this room.

MAJOR. Well, that proves conclusively enough that some one

has been here. Things don't disappear in that fashion by themselves.

CONST. (*looking around and spying placard*). And O Uncle, do look at that!

MAJOR. What is it? (*They approach and read aloud together.*) "Wait. Will return soon. Dick Foster and Nat Stillman."

CONST. (*repeating excitedly*). Nat Stillman! Is it possible that he lives here?

MAJOR (*testily*). Well, upon my word, that's the coolest proceeding I ever heard of! I suppose we must wait here until those things are returned.

CONST. (*abstractedly*). I suppose so. (*Aside.*) Well, if that isn't queer! To think of his living here!

MAJOR (*very excited*). This is outrageous, my dear! And it's my opinion that's hung there simply to mislead us, and give them a chance to escape us.

CONST. (*laughing; aside*). O Uncle, I don't believe so. Don't be so angry. I am sure there is some mistake.

MAJOR (*trying to maintain dignity*). I'm going to find out about this thing. I'm going to rouse the rest of the people in this house. I'll be back shortly. You stay here, and if they come back you'll be waiting. Depend upon it, they won't. (*Exit hastily, L.*)

CONST. (*dropping into chair and laughing*). Oh, poor dear old Uncle! He's lost his favorite photograph and his temper, not to mention everything else besides, and has no prospect of finding them again, so far as I can see. I wonder (*meditatively*) what makes him so fond of that photograph? I wonder why I never saw it. I mean to ask him about it, but somehow I never dare to when the time comes. How he did hunt all over these rooms for it, while I tended to the dinner on the stove. I suppose I had no right to touch it, but dear me, I couldn't stand there and see everything go to rack. That gravy was burning, too. I hurt my finger with that, but it's better now, I guess. (*Examines it.*) To think of leaving a whole dinner that way to spoil. You can thank me, Mr. Nat Stillman, that it's all right now, and you can just hurry back with my belongings, too. That's the least you can do. Uncle wouldn't leave anything unturned, he was so upset himself; but it was no use. He was just ready for this room too, but I'm sure it isn't here. Oh, dear, I ought to have told Uncle that Mr. Stillman was a friend of mine. But, mercy, I didn't dare, he was so angry: he never would let me have anything to do with him again, and I shouldn't want him to have a bad opinion of Mr. Stillman. Dear, dear! what a good time we had together last summer. (*Rises restlessly.*) I can't imagine what he means by this performance. There must be some mistake. (*Facing placard; reading.*) Dick Foster. Oh, yes; that's his chum. I've heard him speak of Mr. Foster. I wonder if he's as nice as Mr. Stillman. (*Pauses; looks at herself in glass; slowly.*) Constance Oldfield, this sort of

thing has gone on long enough. You must know yourself. Are you in love with Mr. Stillman or not? You ought to question yourself and think deeply, for it is too sacred a subject to treat lightly. Are you in love? (*Turns from glass.*) Do I love Mr. Stillman, or is it a passing fancy—a first infatuation? Could I be willing to love, honor, and obey, in sickness and in health, till death us do part? (*Thinks.*) Yes, oh, yes. Could I be willing to live without him? (*Thinks.*) Oh, I shouldn't want to try; it would be so hard! Would I be willing to live with him in a flat? (*Ponders long; sighs.*) Yes—yes; I think I would. Yes; this must be love—deep, sincere, ardent love. Yes; O Nat (*strikes rapturous attitude*), how I love you!

MAJOR (*calls without*). Constance!

CONST. There's Uncle.

MAJOR (*still without*). Constance, come here, will you, and help me with these things. (CONSTANCE goes L. and helps MAJOR with bundles; enter MAJOR L.)

CONST. Why, Uncle, you've found them, haven't you?

MAJOR (*testily*). Most extraordinary. They were out here all the time. I can't make it out at all.

CONST. How very strange!

MAJOR. I should say so! I inquired about these people from other occupants of this house, and it seems two young men live here and their servant. They're spoken well of, and, in fact, seem to have deceived every one completely.

CONST. I don't believe they have the photograph.

MAJOR. My dear, I see no reason for not believing so. I know one of them has. I can't tell which.

CONST. (*hesitatingly*). Uncle, you never told me about the picture. Did I ever see it?

MAJOR. No, never. (*Long pause.*) It's the picture of a young lady. I think a great deal of it.

CONST. (*going and kneeling down by him*). Uncle, tell me; were you ever in love?

MAJOR (*shortly*). Yes, my dear; and I'm in love now.

CONST. Now? You never told me before, and I've lived alone with you all these years.

MAJOR. You never asked me before all these years.

CONST. Uncle, is it the young lady whose picture you have lost that you love?

MAJOR. Yes, Constance; it is.

CONST. Is the picture very beautiful?

MAJOR. It is a dream of beauty, my dear.

CONST. Uncle, shall you marry her?

MAJOR. My dear, I will tell you all about it, and I shall expect you to confide in me when *your* time comes. Is it a bargain?

CONST. (*eagerly*). Oh, yes, Uncle! Perhaps the time will come sooner than you expect.

MAJOR (*astonished*). Constance! how soon?

CONST. That depends on how long you take to tell me your story. You have to begin, you know. Remember the bargain.

MAJOR (*pinching cheek*). Ah, you have me there, my dear! Hark! What's that? (*A hurried, impatient knock sounds R. C., and is repeated.*)

CONST. (*joyfully*). That must be he — but why should he knock?

MAJOR. Come in.

(*Enter MRS. MORTIMER and DELLA hurriedly, both laden with bundles and much out of breath.*)

MRS. MORTIMER (*they pause in astonishment; aside to DELLA*). Who can these people be? I thought we were the only guests.

DELLA (*aside to MRS. MORTIMER*). I've no idea. I can't see how Dick could invite such queer-looking people as these, without letting us know, either. I'll just pay him for it!

MRS. MORT. (*staring about and speaking to all*). So these are the rooms, are they? Well, they do very well; but I see nothing of the gentlemen.

MAJOR (*stepping forward*). Er — pardon me, madame — but wait; they will return soon.

CONST. (*stepping to mantel*). You see the notice they left. And that explains it, Uncle. Of course (*to MRS. MORTIMER and DELLA*), it was written for you.

MRS. MORT. (*looking at notice*). I can't see why it should have been written for anybody.

DELLA. I told you that was Nat I saw wandering along the street, but you said it couldn't be.

MRS. MORT. (*excitedly*). My dear, it is not to be wondered at that I did not suppose it possible he could be walking the streets at such a time as this:

DELLA (*setting down bundles*). I'm afraid *anything* is not only possible but probable in their case.

MRS. MORT. (*setting down hers*). Well, I think it's outrageous for us to have hurried the way we did for nothing.

MAJOR (*with dignity*). Madame, may I offer you this seat? And allow me to introduce my niece and myself — Miss Oldfield and Major Pomroy. (*Bows stiffly; MRS. MORTIMER bows.*)

MRS. MORT. I am glad to meet you — and I am Mrs. Mortimer. Let me present my daughter — Major Pomroy and Miss Oldfield. (*All bow.*)

DELLA (*aside*). Where could the boys have met these people.

MRS. MORT. (*sinking into chair*). You see, my daughter and I thought we'd do a little shopping — just a few things, you know, before we came to dinner; but the time went so quickly that we couldn't do all we wanted to, and we hurried here so fast that I can hardly speak now, my heart beats so.

DELLA (*looking about*). Mercy! what has been happening in this room?

MRS. MORT. It is so rude, I think, to be late to a dinner when everything is all ready and waiting, and I told Della. Della, I said —

DELLA (*turning to table*). Now do look at this mess. What can it be?

MRS. MORT. Della, I said, we must hurry along with the few things we have, for the dear boys will be so disappointed —

DELLA (*turning to mantel*). Good gracious, Mamma! Look at this clock!

MRS. MORT. (*turning*). There, don't tell me it's after six just when we've hurried so.

DELLA. Well, I guess not. Five minutes past five. See!

(*All go and examine clock.*)

CONST. Perhaps it stopped. (*All listen.*)

MAJOR. No; that's going all right.

CONST. What does your watch say, Uncle? This must be wrong.

MAJOR (*consulting watch*). Well, that's most extraordinary!

ALL. What does it say?

MAJOR. Ten minutes of four. (*Chorus exclaim; holds watch to ear.*) It's stopped. It hasn't done that before for years.

DELLA. That explains all these things lying around here. They are preparations for the dinner, of course.

MRS. MORT. This is too much.

DELLA. Let's go back, mamma, and finish our shopping. This will be embarrassing for the boys.

MRS. MORT. Why, my dear, that's out of the question, now. (*Groaning.*) To think of all that rush and worry for nothing.

CONST. (*effusively*). Never mind, we'll all wait together and bear one another up.

DELLA (*sweetly*). Isn't it strange, but I can't remember ever to have heard either Mr. Foster or Mr. Stillman speak of Major Pomroy or Miss Oldfield.

CONST. (*distressed*). Haven't you, really?

MAJOR (*turning from MRS. MORTIMER*). There is no reason why you should. They have never seen us nor we them.

CONST. (*softly*). I've met Mr. Stillman, I think.

MRS. MORT. Then you were not invited to dinner to-night?

MAJOR. No, madame. I came upon an errand. Yes, one of them has something of mine which I would like.

DELLA. Indeed. I am familiar here. In fact, I am engaged to Mr. Foster. Could I help you in any way?

MAJOR. Perhaps you could. Yes, I believe you could. At any rate, I might as well tell you.

CONST. But you're not sure, Uncle, which one has it.

DELLA. Never mind, go on, you fill me with curiosity.

MRS. MORT. Yes, do tell us.

MAJOR (*leaving* CONSTANCE). Well, it happened in this way. I am now in the act of moving, or more accurately, am just about settled in a new home. Well, in passing from our old home to the new, we are obliged to pass through this street. To-day we were making a last trip, we were moving a few last things, and among them was a photograph, which I found to my dismay, when I reached our destination I had lost on the way.

DELLA. A photograph!

MRS. MORT. A photograph!

MAJOR. I retraced my steps with my niece, examining the way carefully. As I reached that shop just opposite this building, the man who keeps it accosted me, and asked me if I was looking for anything, I replied, yes. He answered and said that he had seen it picked up by a young man who lived in this building, and he very kindly told me the number of the room. I asked the name of the young man, and he said he had forgotten, but I could easily find out. I have been here some time now, but I have not found out yet. It is either Mr. Stillman or Mr. Foster, and I don't know which. There, you have my story.

DELLA. Pardon me, whose photograph was it — a man's?

MAJOR. No, it was not. It was the picture of a young lady.

MRS. MORT. And pardon *me*. Was the young lady pretty?

MAJOR. She was very beautiful, and I value the picture very highly.

DELLA. Very beautiful! Ah!

MRS. MORT. Very beautiful! In — deed. (MRS. MORTIMER and DELLA exchange glances.)

CONST. We have looked all about here for it — at least poor Uncle has, and he hasn't been able to find it.

DELLA (*bravely*). Well, Major Pomroy, if Mr. Foster has it, I think I can persuade him to return it.

MRS. MORT. (*majestically*). And should Della be unsuccessful, I think I may well promise my assistance, Major Pomroy.

MAJOR (*doubtfully*). I am very much obliged to you, ladies.

CONST. (*in anguish*). But if Mr. Stillman had it?

DELLA (*rising, agitated*). Mr. Stillman! Impossible! He wouldn't keep it. He hates ladies.

MRS. MORT. (*rising, agitated*). Be calm, Della. All will yet be well.

MAJOR (*dubiously*). I am sorry to have caused you any anxiety, ladies.

CONST. It may be that they are out now trying to find the owner.

DELLA. It's much more probable they're trying to find the original, I'm afraid.

MRS. MORT. (*aside to DELLA*). There, there, Della. You must calm yourself. You are so jealous, and easily excited. It may be that they have no intention of keeping the photograph. I hadn't thought of that.

DELLA. How fortunate we found this out while they were gone. They might never have told me. (*To POMROY.*) Major, I am very grateful to you for telling me about this, and I'm sure the least I can do is to get the photograph back for you.

CONST. Hark! I hear some one coming. There are two people.

DELLA. Ah! It must be they! Now, then!

MRS. MORT. (*aside to DELLA*). Remember, Della, be calm. It is only by being calm (*very excited*) that we can accomplish anything. Remember, too, that I am here to help you.

DELLA. The wretch! to think he could deceive me so.

CONST. (*aside*). O Nat, I am to see you now, face to face. (*Hand on heart.*)

MAJOR (*eagerly*). At last your sweet face is coming back to me, Athia.

(*Enter, L., very hurriedly, DICK and NAT, the former with candy.*)

DICK (*aside*). Frozen pudding gone forever. Heaven help us. Ah!

(*They exchange greetings with MRS. MORTIMER and DELLA, who are cold and stiff; MAJOR and CONSTANCE stand in background at L.; CONSTANCE betrays agitation at NAT's bandage.*)

DELLA (*constrainedly*). So glad you could come, gentlemen.

DICK (*gayly*). So glad to be able to come, ladies. So kind of you to ask us.

NAT. Hope you haven't been waiting long.

MRS. MORT. (*majestically*). The time has passed quickly enough in company with Major Pomroy and Miss Oldfield. (*NAT sees Miss OLDFIELD with surprise.*)

NAT (*stepping to L.*). Eh! Miss Oldfield. If I'm not mistaken, we've met before.

CONST. (*coming forward*). I wondered if you were the Mr. Stillman. I'm so glad you are. Uncle, this is a friend of mine, Mr. Stillman, Major Pomroy. (*Bows stiffly.*)

NAT. Now, allow me to present my chum, Mr. Foster, Miss Oldfield, Major Pomroy. (*Bow.*)

DICK. Now is there any more introducing to be done? Every one knows everybody else?

MRS. MORT. (*dramatically*). At least it is to be hoped, sir.

MAJOR. You have, doubtless, been wondering why Miss Oldfield and myself are here, Mr. Foster?

DICK. Friends of Nat are always welcome, of course.

MAJOR. Of course. I could hardly say, however, that we came in the capacity of friends.

DICK. Indeed. In what capacity may I ask?

MAJOR. It is rather unpleasant for me to state. Couldn't you possibly guess?

DICK. I'm afraid not. I'm poor at guessing. Perhaps Nat might know.

NAT. (*agitated*). I can't imagine.

MRS. MORT. (*rising dramatically*). Perhaps I might help you, gentlemen. Do you happen to have a photograph in your possession?

DELLA (*to DICK*). Of a young and beautiful woman, sir?

DICK. My dear, of course. Haven't I a photo of you? What a question!

MRS. MORT. My daughter is not to be put off in that way, and if she is, I'm not.

DICK. My dear madame, of course not. I know perfectly well you can never be put off.

MAJOR. Let me explain to the young men, ladies. Mr. Foster and Mr. Stillman, I lost in the street near here a photograph of a young lady; and one of you, I don't know which, was seen to pick it up. I was told that whoever you were, you lived here.

DICK (*musingly*). A photograph?

DELLA. Yes, sir, a photograph.

MRS. MORT. Exactly, sir, a photograph.

DICK (*elaborately*). What time, sir, did this happen should you think?

MAJOR (*considering*). I should think about four o'clock.

DICK. You say the picture was beautiful?

MAJOR. Very beautiful indeed. (NAT *nods head affirmatively*.)

DICK. Are you perfectly sure the eyes did not squint? (NAT *starts indignantly*.)

MAJOR. Oh, perfectly.

DICK (*with a hopeless air*). And her nose was not a trifle large as you remember? (NAT *with difficulty restrains himself*.)

MAJOR. Oh, no, not a bit, sir.

DICK (*softly*). How about the mouth?

MAJOR. Perfect, sir, perfect. Wasn't it, Constance?

CONST. You know I've never seen it.

MAJOR. Oh, to be sure. Still, the mouth was the most perfect feature.

DICK (*resignedly*). Oh, well, the photograph you picked up, Nat, couldn't be the one, could it?

NAT (*faintly*). I suppose not.

DICK (*hurriedly*). Oh, no—no. I'm very sorry, sir, but I'm afraid you've struck the wrong people. I'm very sorry, I'm sure.

MAJOR. But where is this other photograph?

DICK. Oh, dear me! It must be around somewhere. If we come across it I'll show it you; but, really, it isn't worth looking at, is it, Nat?

NAT (*faintly*). Oh, no. (*Suppresses great indignation*.)

DICK (*hurriedly*). There now, that's very pleasantly settled, I'm sure. Too bad you're disappointed, Major, but I haven't a doubt but what you'll find the right man if you look about sharply enough: Have you, Nat?

NAT (*faintly*). No, oh, no. (*Shows great discomfort.*)

MRS. MORT. (*glaring*). This seems to be a most remarkable coincidence, this finding of photographs.

DELLA (*suspicious*). Yes, most extraordinary indeed.

CONST. (*dutifully*). It just goes to prove that we can't be too careful in accusing another of anything, or of forming opinions with no truth to base them upon.

MAJOR. My dear, you speak well, as you always do. It now only remains for me to offer my sincerest apologies to Mr. Foster and Mr. Stillman, and go immediately. Mr. Foster —

DICK. Don't mention it for a moment, sir.

MAJOR (*to NAT*). I disturbed your little dinner-party with an unpleasant — er — errand ; so err — erring an errand.

NAT (*agitatedly*). We cannot blame you, sir, for you certainly had ground for coming here and claiming your photograph.

MAJOR. You are too kind, sir. And now the least we can do, my niece and myself, is to retire immediately, and leave you undisturbed to yourselves. (*Turns to make farewell remarks to MRS. MORTIMER and DELLA in corner at R.*)

NAT (*catching hold of DICK distractedly, aside*). They must not be allowed to go. They are the only ones who can tell me who it is. (*Tapping his heart.*) I must know. Miss Oldfield will tell me. I know her well, and she'll do it. We must invite them to dinner ; everything —

DICK (*resignedly ; aside*). Well, do as you like. I'm not going to say any more. I resign from any more of your steering. I call your idea ridiculous, though.

MAJOR (*approaching DICK and NAT, and shaking hands*). Good-afternoon, Mr. Foster and Mr. Stillman. I'm glad to have met you even under circumstances so very — er — unpleasant.

NAT. Major, I do not wish you and your niece to go. Nothing would please me better than to have you take our little informal dinner with us. I haven't seen her since the time when we enjoyed ourselves so much together. I want — er — to talk over old times so much.

MAJOR. Oh, really, I couldn't possibly — I — er —

NAT. Mr. Foster seconds the invitation most heartily, don't you, Dick ? (*DELLA makes signs to him most abusively.*)

DICK (*grinning*). Indeed I do ; and I'm sure the ladies would be greatly pleased by the acquisition. Wouldn't they ? (*Turning to them.*)

MRS. MORT. and DELLA (*together*). Oh, most charmed. Do stay.

CONST. O Uncle, do let's stay ; it's so kind of them to ask us, and you know there won't be much to eat the first night in our new house.

MAJOR (*hesitating*). Well — I don't know — I have some things here, you know, for our dinner — tripe — a can of tomatoes — er —

DICK. My dear Major, add them to ours and we'll make one

dinner of it. That'll be jolly, and there'll be enough to go round. This is a godsend. Say no more, sir.

CONST. Oh, yes, Uncle. Besides (*looking out of window*) I do believe it's going to rain. Yes, hear the thunder—you know you hate thunder. (*Loud peal heard; MRS. MORTIMER shrieks.*)

MRS. MORT. Mercy! Thunder! Oh, dear me, it makes me so nervous! You don't suppose we'll have a thunderstorm?

DICK. Looks very much like one, and we absolutely refuse to lend umbrellas.

CONST. Hear that, Uncle—and I'm so tired. I think it's just providential in Mr. Stillman to ask us.

MAJOR (*laughing*). Well, I don't see my way out of it. I think I shall have to accept your very kind invitation.

DICK. Now that's very nice. We'll have a charming dinner, hey, Nat?

CONST. (*anxiously*). Mr. Stillman, now I have the chance to ask, what has happened to your head?

NAT. Oh, that—oh, it's nothing. You see, we tried to get McGinnis—

DICK. Tut, tut, tut—

NAT (*confused*). Oh, I mean—

DELLA. Quite sure you do?

MRS. MORT. Another mystery. Well, I'm sure this is extraordinary. Who is this McGinnis, pray, and what about him?

DELLA. We have a washerwoman by that mysterious name.

DICK (*mysteriously*). Hush! you mustn't ask. He's our chap-eron, and of course we had to get rid of him. You'll meet him some time. He's real pleasant. Now I suggest that you all go out and remove your wraps, for you've been waiting in there some time, I'm afraid. We'd no idea, though, you'd come quite so soon.

MRS. MORT. Well, indeed, sir—

DICK. Oh, don't apologize. It was real sensible and unceremonious of you—we're delighted. We can all cook the dinner together; for it isn't quite cooked yet, you know. At any rate, the Major's isn't.

MRS. MORT. (*excitedly*). But I would like to know what time it really is, sir.

DICK (*pointing to clock*). And I refer you to our clock, madame.

MRS. MORT. (*agitated*). But that clock cannot be right. It's terribly slow.

DICK. Well, let us see—(*Opens watch.*) I seem to agree with it. How are you, Nat?

NAT (*opens his*). I'm the same. A difference of one minute.

MRS. MORT. (*rises*). I'm going to look. (*General astonishment.*) Well, I never made such a mistake before.

DICK. And never will again, probably.

NAT. Well, I move we all adjourn and remove wraps.

DICK. Cloak-room, ladies and gents, two flights up. Everything checked for five cents.

DELLA. Except your nonsense. I wish to stay behind a moment and speak with you.

DICK. A pleasure, my dear. (NAT, CONST., and MAJOR POMROY, *exeunt*, R.)

MRS. MORT. But I assure you, sir, not for her, poor dear.

DICK. No? You astonish me, madame.

MRS. MORT. (*aside to DELLA*). Shall I stay with you, darling, and support you in this hour of trial? You know I'm used to such scenes. Your father, when he was alive, poor man —

DELLA. Never mind me, Mamma. I'm capable of managing this thing myself. You run along, dear.

MRS. MORT. I will go, but I shall be always near. If I hear you call, I will be with you immediately. Remember, be firm! crush him! Good-by, dear. (*Kisses her. Flares at DICK; aside.*) Ah! I prophesied this. (*Exit R.*)

DICK. Well, my dear, now that we are deserted by melodrama —

DELLA. Well — Mr. Foster, I've added two and two, and the result is repeatedly four. You can't deceive me as easily as the Major and that poor innocent child, his niece.

DICK. But, darling, are you sure you have two and two to add? Isn't it perhaps two and three?

DELLA. I am very sorry to say, sir, I have made no mistake.

DICK. Della, do for once make the answer five. Don't be so fearfully accurate this once.

DELLA (*shaking head*). No; four it is.

DICK (*sighing*). Well, I suppose it must be, then; but I'll tell you now you're wrong.

DELLA. Yes. Now tell me all about that photograph, or consider our engagement at an end, and Mamma and I will go home. (*Starting for door, R.*)

DICK. For heaven's sake, Della, wait! Don't call her. Now don't be hard on a fellow. Come back.

DELLA. Go on, then, quick!

DICK. My dear, I'm not at liberty to tell you.

DELLA. Very well, then. (*Starts again.*)

DICK. Come back. You see, it rests with a second party.

DELLA. You mean Nat?

DICK. Exactly so.

DELLA. Exactly not so. I don't believe a word of it.

DICK. Upon my soul! I hope to die, if I'm not telling the solemn truth. I promised not to mention a word to a soul.

DELLA. Then I must see Nat, must I?

DICK. Why, of course not. That would give me away at once.

DELLA. Oh, I see. Very neat, indeed. (*Laughs.*) Poor Nat. Well, I'm afraid I'll have to go, after all. The mystery seems unfathomable. If you prefer another girl's photograph to me, why, of course — (*Starts again.*)

DICK (*blocks her way*). O Della, don't leave me in this way. Wait at least until I can see Nat, and get permission to take you into our confidence. Will you?

DELLA. Oh, well, as a matter of form, yes. I'll give you that much help to get out of your fiftieth scrape.

DICK. I'll call him. (*Goes to door, R., and looks out.*) O Mrs. Mortimer, you here?

MRS. MORT. (*from without*). I am here, near my poor child.

DICK. Ah, yes. Well, would you be so kind as to tell Nat, if you see him, to come to the parlor.

MRS. MORT. With pleasure.

DICK (*coming back*). There now, perhaps with Mrs. Mortimer away and Nat here we can straighten out matters.

DELLA. It will take more than that, or I'm mistaken.

DICK (*elaborately*). Della, I tell you now I forgive you beforehand. When you know how you've annoyed me, accused me untried, spurned me unheard, trampled on me unconscious as it were, then remember, oh, remember, I forgave you.

DELLA (*laughing reluctantly*). This is not a time for joking.

DICK. Joking! alas, she mocks me! Ah, here comes my deliverer.

(*Enter NAT at R.*)

NAT. Well, what can I do for you?

DICK (*taking him aside at L.; DELLA stands with back turned at mantel*). My dear fellow, we've simply got to take Della into this photograph gag. She actually threatens to break up the engagement and go home at once, besides telling Ma-in-law, if I don't explain the whole thing. She thinks I have the photo.

NAT (*looking over shoulder at her*). Is she safe, do you think?

DICK. Safe, oh, yes, if we tell her. Otherwise she'll do anything.

NAT (*hesitatingly*). Well —

DICK. Besides, perhaps she'll know who it is.

NAT. She might — but then —

DICK (*to DELLA*). Now, Della, Nat's going to tell you all about it.

DELLA (*turning*). Well, I'm ready to hear what he has to say.

DICK. Now brace up, old boy. In the first place, you see, he's in love.

DELLA. I prefer to hear him tell it himself. I'm sure he'd be less ingenious.

DICK. Oh, well, Della, I forgive you — remember. Fire away, Nat, quick, or some one will be coming in.

NAT (*goes and looks outside all doors, then returns with forefinger on lips*). Promise me not a word of this do you repeat, Miss Mortimer.

DELLA. Oh, yes, I promise.

NAT. Dick is right; I am in love.

DELLA. Indeed. Let me congratulate you.

NAT. Thank you. With this. (*Producing photograph.*)

DELLA. Ah! With this. (*Looks at it.*) And is this the photo which Major Pomroy lost?

DICK. The very same.

DELLA. And you never saw the girl; don't know who she is?

NAT (*shakes head solemnly*). It is only too true. (*Sighs.*)

DELLA (*laughing*). Oh, how rich! You romantic creature! In love with a girl you never saw and don't know! Oh, dear! (*Laughs; aside.*) Oh, now I'll have some fun. (*Grows solemn.*) But, mercy, how unfortunate! O Mr. Stillman, I am very, very sorry for you. O Mr. Stillman, to think of your loving her!

NAT (*eagerly*). Why, do you know her? O Miss Mortimer, do tell me about her. Do you know her?

DICK. At last the mystery unfolds. Tell us, Della. Who is this fair one?

DELLA (*with finger on lips*). Hush! (*They all draw close to one another.*) I didn't recognize it at first, for the picture is so flattering; but, oh, dear—now (*pauses*)—you poor man (*lowering voice*)—it looks very much like the daughter—I must first say that she is perfectly respectable—perfectly—

NAT. Yes, yes, go on—the daughter of—

DELLA (*impressively*). Our washerwoman!

NAT. Merciful heavens! It cannot be!

DICK. Anti-climaxes of anti-climaxes!

NAT. This is more than I can bear. (*Despairing attitude.*)

DELLA (*laughing*). She is real nice, well-mannered, Mr. Stillman, and only a slight brogue. Her name is McGinnis—Miss McGinnis.

DICK. McGinnis! By the powers! McGinnis's daughter! There, I knew I'd seen that face before. Saw her out walking with him. Hat with big plumes, pretty street dress. Oh, I tell you, she's stylish.

DELLA. Oh, very, yes; and Mrs. McGinnis told me only the other day that she's practically engaged. A Mr. Mulhooly, a very promising young man, is quite attentive—

NAT. Stop! stop! (*Putting up hands to shield himself.*) I beg you to say no more!

DICK. No, don't, darling. That's enough for now. I declare, I don't know when I've been so upset. I will never believe in anything again—except you, Della. You know I forgave you, my dear, long ago—in case you'd like to be reminded.

DELLA. O Dick, you dear, ridiculous fellow! I don't deserve it, do I? (*Goes to him and embraces him.*) I'm so penitent.

DICK. To accuse me of loving a washerwoman's daughter more than you—O Della! (*Embraces her.*)

DELLA. It's only because I love you so, darling, that I'm so foolishly jealous. (*More embracing.*)

NAT. Oh, don't mind me. Go on; go on.

DELLA. Ah! Isn't it heartless of us to be so happy when poor Mr. Stillman is in such trouble?

DICK. Brace up, old man. After all, it's best to know the worst, isn't it? Just think, Nat, if Della hadn't been jealous, and you hadn't done the handsome thing by me, you'd been fooling yourself still.

NAT. Oh, this is too much!

DELLA (*low tone*). I think we ought to leave him alone with his sorrow. We intrude here.

DICK. Yes; let's let him have it out alone. Nothing like it in such a time.

DELLA. Good-by, Mr. Stillman. We're going now.

NAT. Good-by.

DICK. I'm going to take the Major's dinner out of here, and perhaps I'll send back Miss Oldfield to chirk you up a bit after the first attack's over.

DELLA. Come on, Dick. Oh, what fun!

DICK (*laughing*). Come on to the kitchen. (*Exit, R., DICK, carrying bundles in one arm, with his other arm around DELLA.*)

NAT. (*produces photo and looks silently at it, then rises and paces the room*). McGinnis's daughter, indeed! It can't be. I don't believe it. I won't believe it. Oh, why was I born so unlucky? I Jonah everything I go near. I suppose her eyes must be green, now. A photograph gives you no clew there. Very likely her hair is red, too. O heavens! what have I done to deserve this? She must be freckled if she's taken after McGinnis in the least. Any decent photographer can defeat freckles. What a sight she must be! Probably has a voice like a steam-engine whistle, and Della says, "only a slight brogue." Oh, well! perfectly respectable! Pshaw! Well, I suppose I ought to feel lucky that I got no farther in this mess, at any rate. (*Pause.*) But I'll go farther. I'll find out for sure about this thing. Miss Oldfield will know. (*Flings himself back in chair, with head in hands; enter, R., softly, MISS OLDFIELD. She stands a minute looking at him.*)

CONST. (*aside*). Oh, how beautiful he looks, poor dear fellow! (*Approaching him timidly.*) You are in trouble, Mr. Stillman?

NAT. (*looking up*). Miss Oldfield! How fortunate!

CONST. They told me you wished for me, Mr. Stillman — that you were in trouble. Am I right?

NAT. (*gloomily*). You certainly are; and you are just the person to help me.

CONST. Is it your head? (*Starts to examine wound.*)

NAT. Oh, no; that's nothing. (*Flings off bandage.*) No; it's not my head, it's my heart.

CONST. (*starts*). Ah, indeed! (*Aside.*) At last! Oh, can it be true?

NAT. Miss Oldfield, I want to speak with you on a subject

which has troubled me for some time. Will you let me confide in you?

CONST. (*aside*). He loves me. I feel it. He is going to tell me. How my heart beats!

NAT. First (*leading her to sofa, where they sit*) I must make a confession.

CONST. (*aside*). His former love. (*Aloud.*) O Mr. Stillman, never mind about that. I really don't care.

NAT. I must. I deceived your uncle when I allowed him to think he was mistaken about the photograph. I picked it up. I have it now — here.

CONST. (*turning upon him; slowly*). And why — I don't exactly understand why you wished to keep it from him.

NAT. (*nervously*). I was coming to that. You see, I — well, I wanted to keep it because I — er — well, I liked it so much. In fact, I — er — I'm in love with the face, you see; I thought you might tell me something about her.

CONST. (*swallowing and blinking; looking straight ahead; pause; mechanically*). Yes; I see. (*Rises and crosses to front; tries to stop weeping.*) Oh, oh, oh! how sudden!

NAT. (*follows her*). O Miss Oldfield — er — Constance — tell me, I haven't said anything to hurt you, have I?

CONST. (*trying to laugh*). Me? (*Laughs.*) Me? Oh, dear, no! Only I was thinking. Oh (*starting*), if it were only my picture! Perhaps, oh, perhaps Uncle was joking about my last picture! It was so lovely — not a bit like me. (*Smiles eagerly.*)

NAT. You are not angry with me for deceiving you about the picture, are you? I couldn't bear to give it up.

CONST. (*absently*). Angry? Oh, no — not angry. Let me see the picture, please.

NAT. Here it is, right here. (*As she looks at it; eagerly.*) Isn't it beautiful? Now, you can tell me who it is at last.

CONST. (*moving farther away; aside*). Oh, my heart will break! Uncle in love with this — this horrible creature. Oh, dear (*weeps*), how awful!

NAT. (*anxiously*). Miss Oldfield — Constance. Do tell me why you are so affected. You torture me.

CONST. (*weeping aloud*). Oh, I suppose I oughtn't to tell you, but my uncle is in love with this — this horrible creature, too. Oh, what shall I do if Uncle marries her?

NAT. (*aside*). A rival. Ah! my worst fears confirmed. (*To CONSTANCE.*) But tell me is her name McGinnis? (*Soothingly.*)

CONST. (*prostrate on lounge*). Oh, probably. How can I tell? Her stage name is Lightfoot. Madame Lilian Lightfoot. Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!

NAT. (*starting*). Good heavens! you don't tell me this is an actress?

CONST. (*starting up excited*). I just wish now you would marry

her and then Uncle couldn't. Oh, do marry her, Mr. Stillman, please, please! (*Rising and going to him.*) I'd be so grateful to you.

NAT (*acing to and fro*). But an actress! Are you sure, Miss Oldfield, an actress?

CONST. Oh, it looks very much like her. She's the only woman I ever heard Uncle admire — but then that was when she was dancing on the stage. I never suspected it had come to this. I am so wretched, I declare I wish I could die. (*Weeps and returns to sofa.*)

NAT. I'd be happy to die with you. (*Aside.*) In love with an actress, and that old duffer a rival. I'll be hanged; a pretty finish. Which shall it be, Miss McGinnis or Madame Lightfoot?

CONST. (*starting up*). Promise, Mr. Stillman, that you won't speak to Uncle about this, or let him know what I told you. He'd be terribly angry.

NAT. I promise, if you will, to say as little about this performance as possible. I declare, I don't feel as if I could stand much more of this.

CONST. (*aside*). Oh, why was I called to this bitter sacrifice, — to save my uncle and urge on the man I loved to marry an — actress! But I must.

NAT. You can't tell me any more about this — er — person, can you?

CONST. (*sitting up*). Mr. Stillman, don't mind what I have been saying. I was unstrung. I am prejudiced against the stage; but, believe me, Madame Lightfoot has the reputation of being a beautiful character. (*Aside.*) Oh, ought I to be as deceptive even for this?

NAT. Indeed.

CONST. Oh, yes, perfectly respectable, and I believe comes from a very good family. (*Aside.*) Oh, dear, that was an awful stab.

NAT. You astonish me. I haven't seen her, I believe.

CONST. So charitable, so kind, so beautiful, so — (*Hides her face in pocket-handkerchief.*)

NAT. And yet you don't approve of the match for your uncle.

CONST. (*drying eyes*). But it's so different — so very different. (*Pause.*)

NAT (*solemnly*). Miss Oldfield, Constance, I want to thank you for your very deep sympathy. (*She rises, and he takes her hand.*) You have done me a great service in telling me about this — er — woman.

(DELLA and MRS. MORTIMER appear in doorway at R.)

CONST. I am only glad that I could help you in any way. And you will promise me — (*Lowers voice.*)

MRS. MORT. (*loud aside to DELLA*). It seems we are very *de trop*.

DELLA (*aside*). This doesn't look much like being in love with

a photograph — unless she's the original. Now, Mamma, do be careful.

MRS. MORT. Hush! (*Coughs.*)

NAT (*starting*). Ah! Mrs. Mortimer.

MRS. MORT. (*elegantly*). Pardon this interruption. I wished to speak very seriously with you for a few moments.

DELLA. Miss Oldfield, your uncle is in sore trouble out there in the kitchen. Mr. Foster and he are having a dispute about the proper way of cooking tripe, and he needs a champion. (*Shrugging shoulders.*) I told 'em to boil it.

CONST. Thank you. Oh, dear, I'm afraid they'll spoil it. (*Hurries out R.*)

DELLA. Now, Nat, my dear friend, you've got to do something perfectly horrid for me. You will, won't you?

DICK (*without*). Come, Della, quick, and see what's the matter with this thing.

DELLA (*shouting*). Put it on back of fire — coming. (*To NAT.*) Now, remember. Good-by. (*Exit R.*)

MRS. MORT. This is very awkward and distressing, but it is my duty to speak. You remember, of course, the photograph disturbance?

NAT. I should think I did.

MRS. MORT. Well, I had my suspicions — have now, in fact — as to Mr. Foster's behavior. My daughter was also suspicious, I think; but suddenly Della lost all suspicion, apparently, and defended Mr. Foster very vigorously in my presence. But she would explain nothing to me — said she couldn't. Now, said I to myself, she's proud, and she loves him. She suspects herself, but she allows no one else to dare to suspect. It is hardly possible, too — probable, in fact, that he has bamboozled her. He's that kind. Now, I told Della, said I, "I can't allow you to marry that man until I have proof of his innocence. I couldn't feel comfortable to give my consent without knowing." "I'll marry without your consent," said she. "You'll never get a cent of my money," said I. Then said she, "Go to Mr. Stillman, and he'll show you how the matter really stands." So you see, Mr. Stillman, unless you can satisfy me, I must forbid the banns.

NAT (*after a pause*). I appreciate your situation, Mrs. Mortimer, although mine is none the less painful. However, I feel that I owe it to you, and particularly to my friend, to tell you the truth.

MRS. MORT. You have a fond, but unappreciated, mother's gratitude.

NAT. It is perfectly true that I picked up Major Pomroy's photograph.

MRS. MORT. (*surprised*). You! Oh, well, but Mr. Foster has it. I know he was prevaricating. I haven't known him long and watched him for nothing.

NAT. No, I, alas! have it.

MRS. MORT. Is it possible!

NAT. The reason why I concealed the fact was because I did not wish to give the photo up. The reason why I did not wish to give it up was because the face infatuated me.

MRS. MORT. This had not occurred to me in connection with you — and — might I see the face? Remember, Mr. Stillman, I ask as a mother who wishes to do her duty by her child.

NAT (*hesitates*). I understand. (*Hands her the picture.*) Perhaps you — have seen the face before. (MRS. MORTIMER *looks, stares at it, grows rigid, rises stiffly, falls back, shrieks loudly.*) My dear madame! My dear madame! (MRS. MORTIMER *continues shrieking.*) What shall I do! (*Edges away from her; rushes to door at R. and R. C.*) Help! Help! (*Enter MISS OLDFIELD, covered with flour. DELLA with a kettle in hand. DICK with a salt-cellar in one hand and a receipt-book in other. MAJOR POMROY, with large apron on, a pitcher in hand.*)

MAJOR	} (all together). {	What's happened?
CONST.		Has she fainted?
DELLA		One of her old attacks.
DICK		Water! somebody.

DELLA (*kneeling down by her*). She's subject to these turns when she's stirred up at anything. Have you any brandy?

NAT (*rushes out*). I'll see. (*All rush about in a futile manner.*)

MAJOR. Oughtn't her hands to be rubbed?

CONST. Loosen her dress.

DICK. Let me pour a little of this on her face. (*Taking arnica bottle; enter NAT with bottle and glass.*) Lucky we happened to have this in the house.

DELLA (*laughing*). I wonder that you did, sir.

MRS. MORT. (*suddenly sitting up*). That the photograph! that the photograph — that the photograph — photo — photo — photo — photo — photo — (*keeps repeating*).

DELLA. Yes, yes, Mamma — we know — we know. Here, have some more of this. Hush — sh.

MAJOR (*suspiciously*). Photograph! What's this poor woman talking about?

DICK. Merely delirium — poor thing, how she does take on — awful!

MAJOR (*to CONSTANCE*). Constance, do you know what photo she means?

CONST. (*embarrassed*). Why, Uncle — I — I suppose —

NAT. Major Pomroy, I will answer for her since she cannot very well answer herself without involving me. It is your photograph which I have been keeping all the time. You were right in your suspicions. I picked it up and kept it, for I was attracted by the face. I couldn't bear to give it up, but I see I can no longer keep it. I hope you will forgive me for deceiving you and keeping

it. I offer you many apologies. (*Hands photo to MAJOR with bow; aside.*) I hope that's the last time I have to mention that picture to any one.

MAJOR (*with dignity and wrath*). Well, I must say, sir, that I think your conduct calls for a great many apologies and for very little pardon on my side.

CONST. O Uncle, don't be so hard on him. Please forgive him. Please do, for my sake — now that you have your photograph.

MRS. MORT. (*rising again and approaching MAJOR*). My photograph. Give me your photograph, sir.

ALL (*in chorus*). Your photograph?

MRS. MORT. Yes — mine. You needn't all look at me as if I were crazy. I'm quite recovered from my shock. I demand my picture, and will also ask Major Pomroy where he got it.

(MAJOR and NAT collapse in chairs; others stand staring; long pause.)

CONST. Then it isn't a picture of Madame Lightfoot. Oh, I'm so glad — so glad. (*Embraces prostrate uncle.*)

MRS. MORT. (*icily*). It is an old picture of me, taken when I graduated from school. I do not know Major Pomroy, and I do not know why he owns it and values it highly.

DICK (*looking at DELLA*). Not Miss McGinnis! Can it be?

MRS. MORT. (*severely*). I don't know what you mean, sir; but if I mistake not you told this gentleman (*waving hand at MAJOR*) the eyes squinted — the nose was large — preposterous falsehoods!

(DICK and DELLA turn together and laugh in corner.)

MAJOR (*recovering*). Is it possible this is Miss Miggs?

MRS. MORT. It is true I was Miss Miggs before marriage.

MAJOR. And you don't remember me, Adolphus Pomroy! Surely you can't have forgotten, madame.

MRS. MORT. (*slowly*). A-dol-phus Pom-roy. (*Shaking head.*) No, I don't seem to remember?

MAJOR (*eagerly*). You must. Don't you know I was in your class at school but sat in a different room.

MRS. MORT. It seems to me I do, now — yes — you were a queer little fellow.

MAJOR (*eagerly*). Yes — that's the one. }

MRS. MORT. Wore spectacles? }

MAJOR. Yes, yes, that's it }

MRS. MORT. (*melting*). Yes, indeed. Oh, dear, yes — how long ago that seems — but my picture.

MAJOR (*embarrassed; aside*). How embarrassing. (*Aloud.*) Madame, I will make a clean breast of it and get it over with. I admired you so much, and I was so afraid of you, I didn't dare ask you for one of your pictures, but I knew a girl who had one. I —

asked her for it — begged it. Oh, she liked me — she gave it to me, and — er — I've kept it ever since. Can you forgive me?

MRS. MORT. (*softly*). Indeed I can. (*Coyly*.) Ah! but I'm afraid I've changed a great deal since then. I've been through a good deal. I'm a widow, you know.

MAJOR. And I a bachelor.

MRS. MORT. And with many troubles I don't look much like the picture.

MAJOR (*gallantly*). But to me, madame, quite as handsome.

MRS. MORT. (*coily*). Ah, Major, you flatter. But let us sit over here together, and talk over old times. (*Go to sofa; young people come forward.*)

CONST. (*sighs*). Thank heaven it wasn't Madame Lightfoot.

(MAJOR *hands photo to* MRS. MORTIMER, *who refuses it coyly.*)

MRS. MORT. You may keep it now, Major, you've preserved it so faithfully. You have my glad permission. (*Coyly.*)

MAJOR (*receives it with low bow, and puts it in breast pocket*). I shall always preserve it, here next my heart, as long as I live. (*Lowers voice.*)

DELLA. What do you think of that? Doesn't it make you terribly jealous, Nat?

DICK. Nat's in love with Miss Miggs, too, but possibly not with Mrs. Mortimer. Brace up, old fellow, you'll come out all right finally. How do you feel now? (*Feels pulse.*)

CONST. Poor Mr. Stillman, I feel so sorry for you.

DELLA. Who are you going to fall in love with now, Sir Unfortunate?

NAT. I'll tell you. Some nice sympathetic young lady. (*Looking at CONSTANCE.*)

DELLA. Oh, I'm so glad. (*Whispers loudly to NAT.*) She's a real nice girl, and so sympathetic.

DICK (*to CONSTANCE*). He's a fine fellow, make a girl a fine husband.

CONST. (*faintly*). Yes, I'm sure he would. (*Aside.*) I always was.

DICK. Now, ladies and gentlemen, I move we adjourn. Let us walk out to dinner.

DELLA. It isn't cooked, in the first place.

DICK. Is that any reason why we should not walk out to it in its uncooked condition? Those aren't company manners to your host. Be more polite, Della.

DELLA. But, Dick, I tell you parts of the dinner are cooked; let us eat it as it gets cooked. We'll begin on potatoes. Those are nearly ruined waiting.

DICK. Exactly; just what I was about to suggest. By the way, my dear, you've lost your bet on the dinner question. I've cooked it.

DELLA. I'll wait till after dinner before I'll give you a fig. Besides, we all helped.

NAT. We'll have to have soup for dessert. It isn't nearly ready.

DICK. Much better than nothing. The pudding's departed without leaving even a ghost.

CONST. Oh, dear, I'm so hungry.

DICK. So say we all. Let us feast and be merry. Major, will you take as your partner Mrs. Mortimer?

MAJOR. With pleasure, if she will accept. (*Great coyness by both.*)

DICK. Nat, will you support Miss Oldfield in the fray?

NAT. Indeed I will, if she will allow me. (*More coyness.*)

DELLA. She'll be sympathetic if the feast proves indigestible.

DICK. And I have already invited you, my dear, to be my partner. Let us bring up the rear. Let us whistle the wedding march; it seems appropriate.

DELLA. Oh, you dear old goose!

(*They march out, DICK and DELLA whistling the "Wedding March." As they go by table, DICK shouts.*)

DICK. Shades of St. Patrick! The salad dressing. Alas! unstirred, forsaken, and forgot. (*All turn; flourish.*)

DELLA. Bring it along. We'll have the salad later.

DICK. Be it so. Let us march once again. Forward march, to happiness and dinner.

(*They go out, MAJOR and MRS. MORTIMER leading, NAT and MISS OLDFIELD next, DICK and DELLA in rear, whistling from where they left off. Air immediately taken up by orchestra.*)

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